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ABSTRACT

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The Managerial Mystique: Obstacle or Opportunity?

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Abstract

The managerial mystique is built around a core that is mathematical in rationale, steeped in business jargon, male in orientation, and predicated upon assumptions about power relationships. To the extent that it is all of these, it is an obstacle to women. Tracing the history of managerial inroads into education and reviewing recent research related to the training of women for professional and leadership roles reveals that the form of the mystique is changing. This is a result of changing social and political factors including affirmative action programs and the increase in the number of women holding elective office. The evolutionary process continues. The shift is in a direction more compatible with the skills and knowledge women can expect to bring to the managerial arena. To participate in the change, however, women must also be knowledgeable and comfortable in dealing with the current set of rules.

The Managerial Mystique: Obstacle or Opportunity?

The managerial mystique in American education reached full bloom during the golden years of the early sixties. The superintendent was in conference with the chairperson of the School Board, the principal was in conference with the personnel officer, and the curriculum coordinators were gathered to determine the educational priorities of the next decade. The information summaries brought to these deliberations -- the flow charts, the line item budgets, and the population and tax-base projections created an aura around the decision making process. Business practices in the educational community were greatly valued. The managerial mystique was firmly in place.

The beginnings were simple enough. In its earliest forms, it was an individual matter between the parent and teacher. In time the teacher was elected by a vote of the citizens at a town meeting (Graves, 1932, p.1) and in heavily populated areas boards were appointed to oversee educational matters. By 1645, such a board of seven in Roxbury, Massachusetts was given the power to appoint, pay, and remove the schoolmaster and to see to the well-ordering of the school and scholars (Cremin, 1970, p.184).

The "management" of the "system" was carried on after the only educational officer, the teacher, had completed his/her teaching for the day. There was little to manage. The school board made all the financial decisions, set policy for the students, and maintained the building except for the minor repairs done by the teacher (Graves, 1933, p.323).

As more students were enrolled, an adjustment was made both outside and inside the schoolhouse. The board of visitors found the work too complicated, so they delegated it to a small subcommittee which in turn vested the duties in one member, the "acting manager." This person was entrusted with preparing courses of study, determining methods, and enforcing discipline. The arrangement didn't work and the board soon appointed a trained educator from outside their own ranks to be known by the title of "superintendent." Twentieth century educators conjure up the images of the "dame schools" and the schoolmarms of the prairies, but men also presided (Cremin, 1970, p.187). And when the time came to appoint the superintendent, this person was selected from among the males. He took over the clerical duties and the administrative tasks of the subcommittee at a modest stipend (Graves, 1932, p. 408).

Within the school buildings, the complexities were increasing as well. Authority for curricular and instructional supervision

was given to a "principal" teacher who, like the "superintendent," came from among the ranks of those teaching (Bidwell, 1973, p.188). The "principal" teacher was responsible for the supervision of instruction (Graves, 1932, p.324), but the actual duties were clerical. Responsibility was given in academic areas only; fiscal and plant control were retained by the school boards (Bidwell, 1973, p.188).

As the century turned, the day to day administration of expenditures and plant grew beyond the scope of board participation and the superintendent became the executive officer in all aspects of operation. The board assumed a trustee role (Bidwell, 1973, p.188). Enter the school executives.

It is important to note that at the time this authority was being lodged in the office of the superintendent, unfavorable comparisons were made between school and business enterprises (Callahan, 1962, p.6). The country was alive to industrial efficiency models. Educational and business methods were compared in such publications as the Atlantic Monthly (Callahan, 1962, p.6). Criticism was particularly directed at city units which were expanding at unprecedented rates and which were suspected of gross managerial inefficiency. As the costs rose, so did the clamor. It was at this point that "scientific management" entered education.

Educational leaders did not turn to business for models because they sought to gain status through affiliation with a more prestigious group; they turned because they were faced with demands for accountability in terms which educational models were ill-prepared to meet. Response was immediate and varied. A text, Classroom Management, which introduced business terms into classroom practice, ran through thirty reprints from 1907-1927 (Callahan, 1962, pp. 6-7). Within the public education community superintendents gathered to determine the best course of action.

Leadership came from among their ranks. The superintendent in Newton, Massachusetts was invited to address a group of his peers and he was among the first to see this as an opportunity rather than a disaster. He correctly gauged the composition of school boards. They were made up of men familiar with the management practices in business and respectful of them. The role of the superintendent, therefore, was to translate the work of the school into these terms. And, in doing so, this superintendent further urged his colleagues to unify the business and educational aspects of the office and to use this combination to elevate the status of the role. His own success was clearly demonstrated by his move from Newton to Minneapolis in 1914 at the astounding salary of $8,000.00 (Callahan, 1962, pp. 68-77).

But the concern of that time, as today, was for educational accountability in terms of the student's learning as a product. The early translations failed. What school executives did was to increase the number of operations performed on available data. Thus, instead of a productivity measure as might be expected in industry, the efforts went to attaching expenditures to contact hours and formulae to measuring reductions in expenditures.

Just as these forces shaped the role of the superintendent, they shaped the preparation for the role as well.

By 1925, three centers of education were recognized as leading institutions in the preparation of administrative personnel. Teachers College, Columbia, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University had reshaped their programs for administrators. Course descriptions included the terms "professional executive," "budget," and "organization." The University of Chicago entry is described as showing greater emphasis "upon business, financial, organization, and mechanical problems...(Callahan, 1962, p. 199)." Harvard was seen as moving more slowly in that direction. The superintendent is defined in the 1927 Harvard catalog as the professional "general manager" of the entire school system (Callahan, 1962, p.199).

In 1932, the "ideal" preparation at the graduate level would stress state and city administration, school finance, statistical

methods, construction of schools, techniques of publicity, and of course the development of educational theory and psychology of learning (Graves, 1932. p.426). While variations of the theme may have emerged over the period of the next thirty to forty years, the reality remains.

The level of sophistication of equipment and technique has kept pace with the demand. Funds were spent to update all types of data gathering, data retrieval, and data analysis equipment. The managerial mystique was fed and nurtured by seminars and sales-persons. Education was big business.

It continues into the seventies. Fiscal management and account-ability have returned as the central issues with the advent of what has come to be thought of by many as a taxpayers' revolt. New pressure groups have arisen which are not from the business-oriented community. Parents of students with special needs and political groups for whom fiscal efficiency in itself is important, join with the concerned taxpayers to bring about a very different climate. A 1976 survey conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 1977, p.2) cites financing as the number one problem faced by local superintendents. This is closely followed by cost reduction.

Though its origins are humble, though its motivation is not yet sufficiently linked to the basic aims of the educational enterprise, the managerial aspect of the educational leadership position exists-- whether that position is linked with public or private education and whether these are at the local, state, or national level. The mystique is built around a core which is mathematical in rationale, steeped in business jargon, male in orientation, and predicated upon assumptions about power relationships. To the extent that it is all of these, it is an obstacle to women.

The fiscal accountability model requires conversion of educational activity into monetary terms through the application of mathematical formulae. While sex differences in mathematical ability may not be clearly established, a pattern of filtering in mathematics education begins at an early age. Those who do not "choose" to take advanced mathematics at the early high school level are effectively closed out of medicine, economics, engineering, and the sciences. We might add, educational administration. In a 1972 study at a university on the West Coast, 57% of the men applying for admission had taken a strong program in high school mathematics as opposed to 8% of the women seeking admission (Sells, 1975, p.20).

Women, for whatever reason, generally do not approach mathematics with the same interest they bring to the humanities. When a graduate of one of the most prestigious women's colleges in the East confides

that she did not pursue the managing editorship of a small journal in part because she felt that the mathematics of circulation and budget were beyond her, the significance of this point becomes apparent.

The language of business is the language of the managerial mystique. As Miller and Swift, define it, in their book, Words and Women, "Language enables us to interpret and organize the world we experience through our senses, and in that way it provides structure and meaning to what would otherwise be a jumble of impressions (1977, p.137)." Language comes to us through experiences both direct and indirect and it is colored by this experience. While women may have little direct experience with the language of business, they associate positive and negative values with many of the terms. The following is by way of explanation:

> When twenty-five women aspiring to positions in educational administration were asked to respond to a forced choice selection of words related to business and management activities, the results were surprising even to them. Words such as "bureaucracy," "power," "acquisitions," and "politics" were given negative ratings while words such as "collaborative," "team," and "change" were given consistently positive ratings.

One of the women remarked as they explored reasons for this differentiation, "The men at the Harvard Business School would have chosen to reverse the lists." (Clasby, Note 1)

This does not suggest that the value preference of these women

was incorrect, but it makes it clear that the more commonly accepted terms associated with the management of education have a negative social valence for women.

The style of the managerial mystique is masculine. The predominant motivation is achievement and task completion. According to Gellerman, (1963, p.126) the most important way in which the achievement motivation is related to managerial success is the individual's attitude toward risk. Men see risk as an opportunity to win or lose; there is some evidence that women see risk as being entirely negative (Hennig and Jardim, 1977, p.27). The style is also competitive and men have more experience with this than do women.

The rules that prevail in team sport experiences carry over into male-dominated managerial settings. The "rules of the game" are often foreign to women. The "boast" and the "bluff" learned by ten year old boys are read by other men differently than they are read by women. The Shears and Behrens (1965, p.566) study indicated that boys consider it fair to capitalize on an advantage at the grade four level. Girls at that age are aware of winning strategies but do not consistently utilize them.

In one study of decision-making deliberations, with a mixed group, women seldom sought the initiating role. By contrast, men were more active in the mixed group. Men offer solutions to the problem while women have a tendency to reinforce and support the

suggestions of other (Lockheed, 1975, pp. 120-121). Perhaps this is learned as well.

Power relationships are also a feature of the mystique. Kohlberg (1966, p.105) is quoted as having concluded that by age five or six, children award greater power, strength, and competence (and consequently status) to the male. If no independent base in competence can be established before an initial decision-making event, women come to it with less than equal status. The distribution of power is again clearly demonstrable to young boys and men through athletics and other competitive activities. Power is intrinsically based in expertise. It can be based in the ability to reward or punish, or in the position within the hierarchy. The extent to which these bases of power are a source of influence is partially in the eyes of the beholder. Men have a greater feeling of potency than do women (Hennig and Jardim, 1977, p.56). The expectation on the part of men is to do well; sometimes this is not justified in fact, but it is the attitude brought to the situation. Women, on the other hand, are inclined to underestimate their potential for success (Hennig and Jardim, 1977).

Further, they have little opportunity to see power forces at work. Their efforts to avoid confrontation extend to their social and professional lives. The isolation a woman would experience

having brought a force to bear among other women would be too great a price to pay. It is not by chance that collective professional action among teachers only came when the percentage of males in the profession rose.

Clearly, women are culturally disadvantaged as they strive in a changing era to claim a share of the educational leadership positions in the United States. The management aspects of this leadership role contribute to this disadvantage as they are presently organized. They too, however, are subject to the social and political forces which were responsible for their creation and could equally signal their modification. If what has been witnessed is clearly evolutionary in nature, the evolutionary process has not come to a close.

The demographics of the 1970's and 1980's do not replicate the demographics of the past half century. No longer is public or private education in a constant state of expansion. While the age span of persons found in educational institutions may be increasing, the core population between the ages of five and twenty-five is declining. The questions are no longer ones of new construction or expanding student populations. The mathematical questions are those dealing with reduction in force, reduction in transportation, and conversion of buildings. The economics of shrinkage are as unfamiliar to experienced administrators as they are to novices.

The expenditure questions remain, but many are out of the hands of the system's general manager. Collective bargaining is carried on by agents other than the superintendent. This process claims more than eighty percent of the available resources. The remainder is quickly expended on maintenance, supplies, and legislated expenses. The arguments are much less mathematical and much more philosophical. Which programs are to be retained? The standard so wishfully sought at the turn of the century regarding measurement of student progress will require more creative explanations than those found in the contact hour count.

Women in the next decade will also find that they are less shut off from the study of mathematics and business as the impetus of sex-fair policies extends downward into the elementary schools and across into the undergraduate and graduate business programs. Management programs are attracting more women who themselves will seek occupations in educationally related fields.

The language of the managerial mystique will be less foreign because more women will share in it and because it will be given less priority. One need only consider the group which influenced the swing toward the managerial mystique in the first instance -- the school board. The composition of the board is shifting. Much is written about the female membership. In the suburbs it is the rule rather than the exception that women serve. In the City of Boston, two of the five members are female. (Note: The President for 1977 is Kathleen Sullivan, a former teacher of children with special needs). The boards are no longer dominated, no matter how well intentioned, by the business community.

Further, the language will change as new groups become more demanding in terms of access to the decision making process. The greater the access, the more open the procedure, the more participatory the style, the more adapted the process becomes to styles of management which are attuned to the experiences of women. The Blanchard study (1976, p.10) revealed that when the school board had at least two female members, the board was less likely to conceal the decision-making process from the public. Further, the women included in the Taylor study (1973, pp. 125-126), tended to outscore men in the ability to work with teachers and outsiders. They were more concerned with general educational objectives and more democratic in their approach.

The openness of the decision making, which is in part equated with greater participatory style, is being brought about not only through the judgements made by the boards, but by the legislation which is requiring a more open system.

The power bases are shifting as well. Open systems encourage inspection of the uses of authority and power. Affirmative action laws and privacy acts do this as well. Therefore, the art of persuasion must be directed at the merits of the case, since any deviation is more publically examined than in the past. And power based on expertise will be grounded in the knowledge of educational theories and practices.

All of these combine with factors over which women have direct influence. First, the period in which few women aspired, thus few women were chosen for educational administration positions is over, at least temporarily. At Boston University, the number of women enrolled in the educational administration programs equals the number of men. The available federal funds under the Women's Educational Equity Act are going to training women in this area. A generation of young women and women with a "low" career age are reaching into administration through internships and administrative assistantships. They are training in the heartland of the manager and are learning the system as it currently exists. They will not be shut out because

they lack the entry level experience which in the past had come through affiliation with the "old boy" system. It is now legitimate for women to seek these positions which must be openly advertised, and they are making good at them.

A few models are in place. Hopefully, the standard pattern of fewer women in the top ranks will be diminished. There is a wave of qualified women about to enter the profession.

The 80's do not signal the demise of the managerial mystique. They do signal, however, a shift in direction more compatible with the skills and knowledge which women can expect to bring to the managerial arena. This does not suggest that it is unimportant to understand things as they are. It is imperative that women analyze the components as they are currently in place and learn to live with them while they prepare for shifts. There will never be a time when mathematics will be unimportant, when new systems languages will not be introduced, or when management will be without style or a shifting pattern of power. In order to participate in the change, women must be at least knowledgeable and minimally comfortable in dealing with the current set of rules.

The managerial mystique as it is known is crumbling because the priorities are different and the players are different. Women can have a place in the design of the next evolutionary step.

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